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ABSTRACT

A study examined the degree to which certain school phenomena are reported by participants as concerns or activities during their student teaching experience. Particular concerns dealt with included student teachers' problems with curriculum planning, instructional decision making, instructional materials, student assessment and evaluation, student organization and grouping, and classroom management. These findings are part of a larger study by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at Austin, Texas, of the student teaching experience from the points of view of the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor. Student teacher concerns were gathered from transcripts of supervisory conferences, and journal entries. Based on the study findings, a profile of the typical student teacher shows that their major concern is with daily lesson plans and that little attention is paid to long-range planning, student assessment, or grouping. Concern is expressed about the quality of the student teaching experience, and recommendations are made for improvement. (JMK)

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STUDENT TEACHING AND THE COMMONPLACES OF SCHOOLING

Gary A. Griffin

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STUDENT TEACHING AND THE COMMONPLACES OF SCHOOLING

Introduction

This paper presents findings regarding the degree to which certain school phenomena are reported by participants as concerns or activities during a student teaching experience. The paper first considers the phenomena in question and provides a rationale for their inclusion in the student teaching experience. Subsequent sections discuss the study from which the data for this paper were extracted, the specific data sources used for this paper, the systems of analysis used, the findings, and conclusions and recommendations.

Rationale

Certain phenomena are common to almost all school settings. These phenomena include knowledge, ideas, and practices and can be considered "commonplaces." The term commonplaces in regard to schools has achieved widespread use among scholars since Schwab's (1960) coinage. The term, as used here, will include a wider range of phenomena than was originally intended. Schwab acknowledged four commonplaces -- the subject matter, the learner, the teacher, and the milieu. This discussion expands upon those four areas of inquiry and interest largely by defining subcategories. The subject matter is considered here as being transformed and embodied in a program of study as a consequence of curriculum planning and passed on to learners as a consequence of instructional decision making and the use of instructional materials. The student in classrooms is subject to student assessment for the purpose of providing appropriate instruction and student evaluation is engaged in to determine the degree to which the program accomplishes desired ends. Most typically, the assessment and evaluation of students is engaged in by teachers. The milieu is made less problematic by the manner in which teachers decide on student organization and grouping and classroom management.

This paper, then, focuses upon the relative presence of concerns and activities in student teaching as they deal with curriculum planning, instructional decision making, instructional materials, student assessment and evaluation, student organization and grouping, and classroom management.

Both observation of practice and disciplined inquiry support the importance of these elements in ongoing elementary and secondary classrooms. Teachers plan for instruction, whether that planning is characterized by the use of a systematic and carefully adhered-to framework or a decision to simply move to the next section of a commercially-prepared textbook. Second to the teacher's personal influence on students are probably the materials of instruction selected or developed to embody the curricular elements considered desirable for a given group of learners. The decisions made by a teacher before, during, and subsequent to instruction are major influencers of what is learned, how and to what degree it is learned, and how it is perceived in terms of consequences of instruction. In order to promote a match between the curriculum and its transformation into instruction, students are assessed in terms of individual characteristics, interests, and abilities and both during and after instruction are evaluated, informally or formally. Through the use of formal and informal ideological perspectives and diagnostic and prescriptive technologies, teachers group students (or decide not to group students). Also, the teacher alone or with the advice of students creates an environment for learning that is believed to be conducive to accomplishing curricular and instructional tasks.

Without these activities, it is difficult to conceive of an effective, efficient, and satisfying classroom. Without knowledge of and skill in these commonplaces, it is difficult to imagine that teachers could create such a classroom. And, without an opportunity to gain this knowledge and skill prior

to accepting sole responsibility for a classroom group, it is, to a degree, probably a matter of chance whether the teacher will receive the necessary training during the first years of teaching.

There is ample testimony to the frustrations, fears, and failures of first and second year teachers as they assume the complex role of teacher (Ryan, 1974; Stoltenberg, 1981; & Purkerson, 1980). An examination of the literature reporting the difficulties of new teachers reveals a set of recurring themes. Although certainly not exhaustively inclusive, my understanding of these themes leads me to suspect that many new teachers end up "burned out" before they ever had the opportunity to catch fire. The reasons, of course, are many and complicated. Certainly, the continued hierarchical and authoritarian organization of schools creates frustration for teachers who may have been led to believe that they would be allowed to adopt the perquisites of the professional -- autonomy, freedom of decision making, exercise of substantive and methodological authority, and the like (Etzioni, 1969). Also, it must be acknowledged that some teachers come into schools and classrooms unprepared for the more-than-occasionally demonstrated resignation or hostility acted out by some students and their parents. And, it must be noted, a major factor in the disillusionment of teachers, experienced and novice, is the absence of rewards for teachers, whether the rewards be considered formal and material (e.g., money) or informal (e.g., community and societal status) (Dreeben, 1970). These and other social and institutional factors influence how teachers perceive their work and how they respond to the demands of that work.

However, I believe it is insufficient to accept these global statements of conditions of teaching as the sole, or even necessarily the primary, reason for the dissatisfaction of new teachers with their important social roles. My

understanding of the literature and my observations of teachers in both preservice programs and in ongoing school settings suggests the need to consider the relation between so-called "successful" teaching and the knowledge and skill teachers bring to teaching. I would argue that a significant contributor to the reported failures, fears, and frustrations of new teachers is rooted in an inadequate preparation for assuming the role of teacher.

Where does or should the new teacher have received opportunities to learn about and do the requirements of teaching? The most commonly held belief and the most typical practice is that teachers-to-be come into contact with and demonstrate competence with these requirements in a preservice program of professional preparation. The capstone of this professional preparation sequence is most often student teaching, that time when college or university students can observe, interact with, and act out for a supervising master teacher and university supervisor the skills associated with doing teaching. In the best of all possible worlds, the novice teacher will have learned about the place of the aforementioned commonplaces in a set of so-called methods classes, observed them in exemplary classrooms, discussed them subsequent to observation, practiced them under neutral or laboratory conditions, and demonstrated refined use of them in a student teaching experience.

Is this widely-held paradigm -- knowledge to observation to practice to demonstration -- in place in teacher preparation institutions? Particularly, is student teaching an opportunity for prospective teachers to refine and demonstrate knowledge and skill regarding the commonplaces? The remainder of this paper will deal with this latter question.

The Study of Student Teaching

A large-scale, multi-site, multi-method study of preservice clinical teacher education, typically called student teaching, was undertaken by the Research in Teacher Education (RITE) program area of the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education during the Fall of 1981 (Griffin, et al., Note 1). The purpose of the study was to provide a detailed and comprehensive description of student teaching, a means to better understand what happens during the culminating component of a teacher preparation sequence of study.

The participants in the study were engaged in the student teaching experience as a consequence of their membership in two large universities as student or faculty and/or in one or more of twenty-six elementary and secondary schools in three districts providing placements for student teachers. The schools were located in two cities, one metropolitan and highly urban in nature and one mid-sized and less urban. The sample of subjects was composed of 93 student teachers, 88 cooperating teachers, and 17 university supervisors.

The sample of participants was composed of two sub-samples: general and intensive. The intensive sample consisted of a select group of 20 clinical triads. These triads were selected prior to the beginning of the school year as a consequence of university and school system officials' nomination of cooperating teachers whom they would judge to be "effective." These cooperating teachers and the student teachers and university supervisors to whom they were assigned composed the "intensive" sample. The remaining student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors were called the "general" sample.

The design of the study called for an examination of student teaching from three interactive vantage points. First, the individuals who engage in student teaching were focused on in terms of professional and personal characteristics which a review of relevant literature suggested would impact upon the conduct and outcomes of student teaching. Second, the interactions of these persons were studied as student teaching was carried forward for an eighteen week period. Third, the contexts in which student teaching took place, university and public elementary and secondary schools, were examined. The study procedures also allowed for examination of the nature and effects of the interactions of the participants, their work together, and the contexts in which that work occurred.

The complexity of this design called for both qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures. A battery of instruments was assembled which examined the participants as individuals in the process (Hughes & Hukill, Note 2). Procedures for studying the interactions of the participants included individual journals kept by members of the intensive sample, audio recordings of supervisory conferences in the intensive sample, and interviews and questionnaires were used with the entire sample. Inquiry regarding the contexts was conducted through observation in intensive sample schools and classrooms and through content analysis of official documents of the sponsoring institutions. This amalgam of procedures provided a rich and extensive data base from which to conduct a variety of analyses related to student teaching.

The findings from the larger study are reported elsewhere (Griffin, et al., Note 3) and include detailed discussion of purposes and procedures, the participants, changes in participants, the contexts, supervision and feedback procedures, teaching, and outcomes of student teaching.

Data Sources Regarding Commonplaces and Student Teaching

This paper concentrates upon the commonplaces of schooling and their role in student teaching. This focus was not one of the original research intentions of the larger study noted above but emerged as a consequence of attempts to understand what was being observed during the course of both data collection and analysis of data collected for that study. The RITE research team became concerned that there was little variation across settings in terms of practice, characteristics of participants, and participants' views about the experience. Certainly, there was almost no variation in terms of reported outcomes, either as determined by a RITE instrument or by formal evaluation systems used by the universities. There was, however, variation in terms of contexts. These variations were demonstrated in terms of demographics of the settings, formal and informal organizational properties of the settings, and characteristics of pupil populations but these differences appeared to have little or no effect on either the people or the practices in student teaching.

A decision was made to reexamine in some detail the audio recordings of supervisory conferences (O'Neal, Note 4) and to extract from journals kept by intensive sample members those comments which reflected interest in, knowledge of, questions about, or concerns with the commonplaces as identified earlier in this paper. These data sets, transcripts of conferences and journal entries, form the bases for the discussion that follows. We were satisfied with using the data from only the intensive sample of 20 triads in that statistical analyses conducted to determine sample differences revealed no significant differences. We can, then, with some confidence generalize the findings from the intensive sample to the general sample.

Data Analysis

Conference tapes were first transcribed and then coded using a variation of Weller's (1971) MOSAIC system of analysis. This coding system was developed to provide information about how the exchange of information between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher took place. The coding focused upon describing the exchange of information between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher -- who did the talking, to whom the talk was directed, and what type of talk occurred. In terms of content, the nature of the topics discussed in the conferences was examined.

Process data for all conferences were collapsed. Mean frequencies and percentages were used to describe the conferences. Frequencies were derived from the number of typed lines contained within each statement. A statement was defined as one participant's turn in the conversation and may have contained information about more than one topic.

Conference statements were also analyzed with regard to what was said. The most frequently noted content issue was "teaching." This category was considered from three possible vantage points: generality (referring to specificity), focus (referring to issues such as the commonplaces noted earlier), and domain (referring to cognitive, affective, or social/disciplinary).

The journal data were first examined and coded according to the presence or absence of the commonplaces. Frequencies were established for each commonplace, and then specific subcategories were developed, using the frequencies as the data, for each commonplace. The individual profiles of frequencies for each subcategory were then collapsed across the 20 intensive sample triads to provide a picture of the presence of the commonplaces in the student teaching experience for this set of participants.

There is, of course, a set of limitations to the findings which were drawn from these data sets. First, mathematical generalizability to student teaching in general is not possible although logical situational generalizability might be assumed given a perceived match of this sample's characteristics and experience to others. Second, the fact that this is, essentially, a secondary analysis and rooted in an emergent research question rather than a primary one may have influenced the degree to which the data can be "trusted." Third, and most serious, is that the participants were not directed by the research procedures to focus upon the commonplaces in their journals. Instead, they were urged to record those events, activities, ideas, concerns, and thoughts which were dominant for them at any point in time. It is assumed, however, that the dominant themes of student teachers would emerge through this procedure and, subsequently, it was believed that these themes would reveal the relative importance and presence of the commonplaces to the participants in the study.

Findings

In regard to supervisory conferences, Table 1 displays findings related to the content of the audio recorded discussions between student teachers and cooperating teachers. It can be noted that the talk was highly specific. In fact, that specificity is related to situations in particular classrooms in which the student teachers and cooperating teachers functioned together. There was very little talk of a more general nature, talk which would lead the student teachers to consider that different situations and different settings with different participants might be considered as either sources of possibilities for alternative action or as situations which might be encountered by the student teacher in his or her future assignments as teacher.

It can be seen that the primary focus of the conversations in supervisory conferences, dominated by the cooperating teacher, was materials and methods. This talk was, as noted earlier, highly situation-specific and included attention to specific texts, page numbers, worksheets, and the like. The attention to methods (i.e., instructional practice) was centered on "how to" statements in terms of how specific instructional objectives could be achieved. Execution of lessons refers to the instructional interactions between the teacher, pupils, and the curriculum. These conversational components were generally either prescriptive ("In order to help the students understand division of fractions, you should. . .) or reflective ("I might have gotten John to understand division of fractions if I had . . .). A distant third to materials and methods was consideration of content and objectives -- that is, the stuff of which curriculum is made (Goodlad, 1979).

The table also illustrates the dominance of consideration of the cognitive domain of human behavior for this sample of student teachers and cooperating teachers. Little attention was paid to the affective dimensions of school and classroom life (i.e., personal and interpersonal aspects of schooling such as cooperation, valuing, appreciating, etc.). There was, however, considerable attention, approximately a third of the typed lines of conversation, given to the social/disciplinary aspects of teaching and learning. This theme is repeated, to a degree, in the analysis of journal entries.

In regard to the commonplaces included for consideration here, there is evidence from the supervisory conferences between student and cooperating teachers of attention to classroom management (social/disciplinary domain), instructional materials, content and objectives, and instruction (although not specifically instructional decision making). The arenas of curriculum

Table 1

Content Data from Cooperating Teacher/Student Teacher Conferences Dealing with Teaching - Mean Number of Typed Lines and Percentages by Participant*

		Generality		Focus				Domain			
		1*	2	1**	2	3	4	1***	2	3	4
Cooperating Teachers	Mean Frequency of Occurrence	150.47	25.86	29.64	95.50	42.68	8.77	113.14	4.73	43.44	15.15
	Mean Percentage	89.67	10.30	17.70	50.98	26.11	5.47	69.02	3.39	21.44	6.18
Student Teachers	Mean Frequency of Occurrence	60.59	5.97	11.79	30.73	20.68	3.64	42.18	2.14	15.47	6.98
	Mean Percentage	91.33	7.12	21.06	41.98	31.12	4.45	67.64	3.53	20.77	6.53

Note that percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding error.

Categories

* 1. specific statements
2. general statements

** 1. content and objectives
2. materials and methods
3. execution
4. other

*** 1. cognitive
2. affective
3. social/disciplinary
4. other

planning, student assessment, student evaluation, and student grouping apparently received short shrift in the conferences.

The journal entries were examined to determine if the preoccupations of the participants, in the form of what they wanted the research team to know about, would reveal a more discrete and, perhaps, more comprehensive picture of the role of the commonplaces in student teaching.

The composite number of entries for subcategories of the commonplaces is noted in Table 2. The presentation of these findings is organized to illustrate (1) the number of instances for cooperating teachers and student teachers considered together, (2) the number of instances for cooperating teachers as a group, and (3) the number of instances for student teachers as a group. Although it must be acknowledged that the number of journal pages varied across the intensive sample, the opportunity to present concerns, reactions, ideas, and other information to the research team was extended over an eighteen week period with regular reminders of the importance of the procedure. It is likely, then, that these figures are representative of both the subjects and the time period sampled.

Table 2 demonstrates that for the entire group of cooperating and student teachers in the intensive sample curriculum planning was the dominant theme in journal entries. There was little difference between cooperating teachers and student teachers in terms of the presence of this commonplace.

Classroom management was a distant second in terms of frequencies for the entire sample and also for both cooperating teachers and student teachers, with the latter group mentioning it somewhat more than the former.

Table 2

Frequencies and Means of Entries Regarding
Commonplaces in Cooperating and Student Teacher Journals

	Composite (N=38)		Cooperating Teachers (N-19)		Student Teachers (N=19)	
	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean
Curriculum Planning	541	14.24	286	15.05	255	13.42
Classroom Management	249	6.55	99	5.21	150	7.89
Instructional Materials	177	4.66	57	3.00	120	6.31
Instructional Desicion Making	162	4.26	47	2.47	115	6.05
Grouping of Students	27	.71	6	.32	21	1.10
Student Evaluation	24	.63	5	.26	19	1.00
Student Assessment	20	.53	9	.47	11	.58
	1200		509		691	

Instructional materials and instructional decision making were next in number of frequencies, with student teachers demonstrating more than twice as much preoccupation with these commonplaces than cooperating teachers.

The commonplaces directly focused upon students received very little attention from either group of participants in this study, again with student teachers showing more interest and concern with these issues although the amount of concern, as measured by frequencies, was still proportionately very low.

When one examines the subsets of entries in the dominant theme, curriculum planning, it is clear that the focus is upon the most specific and discrete aspect of that activity, the lesson. Table 3 illustrates the frequency of journal entries according to a breadth, or time, dimension. It can be seen that there is a heavier emphasis upon lesson planning and, to a lesser degree, the unit than any other of the dimensions noted in the journals. Very little evidence in the journals suggests a concern with planning for a day (perhaps not surprising in that student teachers usually teach for only a part of a school day), a week, or a longer period of time. (Of course, it might be assumed that the instances of comments about units could be considered as long term in that the period of time a unit might take to complete is unresolved in almost all of the journal data. When it <u>is</u> resolved, it appears that a unit takes from one to three weeks to complete.)

This necessarily brief presentation of data regarding the degree to which the principal student teaching participants, student teacher and cooperating teacher, demonstrate the presence of the seven commonplaces selected for this paper and suggests a "profile" of a typical student teacher in the RITE study. He or she is concerned and/or occupied with planning for a lesson and

Table 3

Frequencies and Means of Entries Related to Scope of Curriculum Planning in Cooperating and Student Teacher Journals*

	Composite (N=38)		Cooperating Teachers (N=19)		Student Teachers (N=19)	
	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean
Long-term	18	.47	15	.79	3	.16
Unit	45	1.18	25	1.31	20	1.05
Week	20	.58	15	.79	5	.26
Day	12	.31	7	.37	5	.26
Lesson	110	2.89	46	2.42	64	3.37
	205		107		97	

*Note that the total frequencies differ from those presented in Table 2 because of the inclusion of only those entries with a time dimension.

relatively unconcerned or unoccupied with planning for longer periods of time. The planning is specific to a piece of content, a particular classroom group, and a particular point in time. The human environment in which the plan will be executed is given some consideration as is the mode of delivery of the piece of curriculum. Likewise, the materials of instruction to be used is a limited part of the student's planning and reflection. The assessment of students in terms of dealing with the lesson is not a primary consideration nor are grouping of students or student evaluation. (In fact, Barnes [Note 5] has demonstrated that this sample of participants was extremely low in attention given to issues of evaluation.) Naturally, this profile is subject to modification based upon variation of individual participants from the mean but, as noted earlier, there was very little variation demonstrated in the sample except in terms of context differences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper began with a statement of belief. Restated, it was expressed that a possible reason for beginning teacher disillusionment and frustration might be that they were not adequately prepared to cope with the complexity of teaching as revealed by the requirements of teaching. Although there is no means to test that belief with this sample, it is possible to draw speculative conclusions about it in terms of information collected during the RITE study of student teaching.

As demonstrated by the degree to which journal entries provide evidence of preoccupation, activity, and/or reflection, student teachers in this sample were probably well-equipped to deal with planning for a lesson. A problem with this speculation is that the lessons planned were formulated with specific student populations and specific classroom environments in mind. With little attention given to other settings and other students, with what

surety can we guarantee that that lesson planning, and its attendant skills and understandings, will transfer to other students and other settings? Recall that the contexts in the RITE study demonstrated marked variation. If this can be true in only three school districts, what will be the possible variation in the sites into which this sample of student teachers will find placements?

Beyond the lesson as a unit of planning, however, there is little evidence that this sample of prospective students will take to their placements compatible skills in the tasks of planning for longer periods of time. The long-decried lack of systematic articulation of school programs over time appears not to be in any danger of resolution. A class's program of instruction may depend for coherence and reasoned sequence upon the commercially prepared texts and workbooks which, as we know, dominate curriculum content and presentation historically and currently. Until students of teaching are given opportunities to understand and can demonstrate skill in looking beyond the lesson as the object of planning, it is unlikely that these conditions -- lack of articulation and dependence upon commercial products -- will change. This speculation may be part of the reasons for the return to district-wide programs of instruction reminiscent of the so-called "teacher proof" curriculum packages of the 1960's.

A research emphasis in recent years has been upon effective teaching, as defined by the relation of certain teacher behaviors to student outcomes as measured by standardized achievement tests. The data reported in this paper suggest the relative lack of attention given to instruction generally by student and cooperating teachers. Other findings of the RITE study demonstrate that the research findings regarding effective teaching have yet to find their way into student teaching, at least for this sample. This

conclusion emerges from detailed content analyses of journals and conferences among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. Consequently, we have a large group of new teachers whose members have had little exposure to research-derived effective teaching strategies specifically, and little preoccupation with instructional decision making generally.

A new teacher is, quite naturally, concerned about his or her interactions with students. We know that teachers, in fact, perceive their relationships with students as their principal rewards. If one assumes that the strength and quality of those relationships are going to rest in large part upon a systematic understanding of students, proactively (assessment), interactively (grouping), and reactively (evaluation), it is possible to speculate that this group of student teachers will have few tools with which to create positive learning environment relationships with their students.

I would hypothesize that this particular group of student teachers, and others if this sample is representative, will indeed be frustrated and fearful as the demands of teaching become more readily apparent to them. Further, I would hunch that a fair portion of them will think themselves to be failures and will be confused as to who or what should receive the blame for the perceived failure.

Is there a relation between the persistent theme of "I can't teach these students anything," with emphasis upon the student role in this state of affairs, and the possibility that the new teacher has experienced too little emphasis upon the student in a preparation program? Is it possible that the teacher complaints about the demands of the system are rooted in a lack of understanding of the curriculum planning elements inherent in that system? Is it reasonable to assume that the limited attention given to a narrow range of

specific teaching activities is a source of boredom, resignation, and eventual surrender by many students and teachers?

Naturally, these questions are highly speculative and based upon a relatively small data base. They represent, however, intriguing possibilities for action by both research and practice communities.

In terms of research, I would propose a systematic study of the first years of teaching beyond the telling of war stories which characterizes much of the literature at this point. That study should include a well-defined component which captures, as well as possible, the perceptions and thoughts of new teachers regarding specific, not abstract and general, contributions, or lack thereof, of preservice programs to their first years of teaching. I would propose studying the means by which perceived deficits in teaching skill and knowledge are dealt with by emerging induction programs or ongoing inservice teacher education programs in school systems. I would like to examine a range of theoretically and practically different preparation programs to see if there is a relation between certain program elements and certain first-year teaching outcomes. (Few studies of this kind have been done and the ones that have been conducted have depended more on recall by subjects than upon independent observations of practice.)

Regarding the practice of clinical teacher education, I would urge teacher educators to consider requirements of teaching and the commonplaces of classrooms and schools as central program components. I would also recommend that the paradigm noted earlier -- knowledge to observation to practice to demonstration -- be resurrected and submitted to rigorous scrutiny regarding its effect upon student teachers and subsequent teaching behavior. I would call for a careful review and justification of <u>what</u> is being observed and practiced. I would urge teacher educators in colleges and universities to

re-examine their standards and expectations regarding selection and training of cooperating teachers.

Although this paper has not addressed the issue, the RITE study found as a central theme in student teaching the neglect of what might be called professional and/or scientific knowledge and activity and the dominance of positive interpersonal expectations among the parties to the action. Certainly, I am not suggesting that we ignore the important part played by positive human relationships. I <u>am</u> suggesting, however, that we really do know more about professional practice than appears to be entering the student teaching experience.

Although these data are relatively "soft" and the conclusions, consequently, must be examined as preliminary speculations, they cause me to be concerned about the quality of the student teaching experience. I would argue that the value of student teaching is, or should be, centered around helping student teachers deal with the commonplaces of schooling. I urge that the ways in which we prepare teachers for the real world of teaching be re-examined, reconstituted, and restructured.

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